

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

Vol 3 No 9 Issue 25

ELECTORAL POLITICS ISSUE

US ELECTION

AUSTRALIA

ONE NATION LEGITIMISES FASCIST IDEAS

The time to stop Hansonism is NOW!

SOCIALISTS RETAIN SEATS

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AOTEAROA

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Layout: Izzy Joy. All images used are in the Public Domain.

Quarterly Magazine

Fightback Vol 3, No 9, Issue No 25.

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4 Editorial

Welcome to the summer 2016 issue of Fightback magazine. This year we have moved from a bi-monthly schedule to a quarterly schedule, focusing on planning themed issues rather than churning content out. We have grown our modest subscriber base to just over 100. We thank you for supporting our magazine, and hope you enjoy it.

We are proud to say that two out of this year's four issues; the **Youth Issue** (coordinated by Kassie Hartendorp) and the **Pasifika Issue** (coordinated by Leilani Viseisio); were contributor-led, with paid contributors from the wider community.

In contrast, this final issue for 2016 is mainly written by volunteer Fightback members, focused on **Electoral Politics and Socialist Strategy**. Many of the articles in the following pages may seem bleak. We argue that since the collapse of the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring, mainstream political discourse internationally has polarised between neoliberalism and a renewed xenophobic, right-wing populism.

This xenophobic current has finally found electoral expression in 2016. Keeping only to the Anglosphere: Brexit in the UK, Trump in the US, and One Nation in Australia all offer racism as a kind of security in uncertain conditions. Meanwhile in India, the 'world's largest democracy', President Narendra's anti-Muslim "communalist" movement thrives.

Conversely, left-reformist campaigns have also emerged internationally – Bernie Sanders' campaign in the USA, Jeremy Corbyn's successful leadership bid in the UK.

However, these popular left campaigns currently have no equivalent in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Instead, NZ's Labour and Greens have both given expression to the international xenophobic trend, making it harder than ever to sustain a case for 'lesser evil' politics.

In principle, electoral tactics can be a legitimate part of left strategy. However, in Aotearoa/New Zealand today, there is little left of the left in this sphere.

We support independent initiatives by leftists, particularly in local body elections, where there appears to be some room to manoeuvre: on an optimistic note, Bronwen Beechey covers successful campaigns by socialists in Australian local body politics (p 11-13). These campaigns are anti-racist, pro-worker and actively empower communities. These principles must come before the 'quick fix' of lowest-common-denominator politics, which increasingly panders to racism.

Ian Anderson, Coordinating Editor

TRUMP AND THE 'POPULIST INTERNATIONAL'

Article by Annie Applebaum, reprinted from the Washington Post (where it was printed under the title 'Trump is a threat to the West as we know it, even if he loses').

This was written before Donald Trump's shock election as US President, and the Washington Post is far from a typical source for a socialist group.

However, the article usefully contextualises Trump's campaign as part of an international right-wing populist trend.

Trumpism taps into a reservoir of nationalist resentment, which is unfortunately the most significant current challenge to neoliberal discourse.

The Democrats failed to provide a convincing alternative, offering a 'business as usual' candidate in unusual times. The #BlackLivesMatter and #StandingRock movements offer the only way forward: an anti-racist, anti-capitalist direct action movement. Leftists must articulate a progressive internationalism, as an alternative to both neoliberal centrism and racist nationalism.

They share ideas and ideology, friends and funders. They cross borders to appear at one another's rallies. They have deep contacts in Russia — they often use Russian disinformation — as well as friends in other authoritarian states. They despise the West and seek to undermine Western institutions. They think of themselves as a revolutionary avant-garde just like, once upon a time, the Communist International, or Comintern, the Soviet-backed organization that linked communist parties around Europe and the world. Now, of course, they are not Soviet-backed, and they are not communist. But this loose group of parties and politicians — Austria's Freedom Party, the Dutch Party for Freedom, the UK Independence Party, Hungary's Fidesz, Poland's Law and Justice, Donald Trump — have made themselves into a global movement of "anti-globalists." Meet the "Populist International": Whoever wins the U.S. election Tuesday, its influence is here to stay.

Although it is often described (by me and others searching for a shorthand) as "far-right," the Populist International has little to do with the "right" that has thrived in Western countries since World War II.

Continental European Christian Democracy arose out of a postwar desire to bring morality back to politics; Gaullism came out of a long French tradition of statism and secularism; Anglo-Saxon conservatives had a historic preference for free markets. Most of them shared a Burkean small-"c" conservatism: a dislike of radical change, skepticism of "progress," a belief in the importance of conserving institutions and values. Most of them emerged out of particular local and historical traditions. All of them shared a devotion to representative democracy, religious tolerance, Western integration and the Western alliance.

By contrast, the parties that belong to the Populist International, and the media that support it, are not Burkean. They don't want to conserve or preserve what exists. Instead, they want to radically overthrow the institutions of the present to bring back things that existed in the past — or that they believe existed in the past — by force. Their language takes different forms in different countries, but their revolutionary projects often include the expulsion of immigrants, or at least the return to all-white (or all-Dutch, or all-German) societies; the resurrection of protectionism; the reversal of



women's or minorities' rights; the end of international institutions and cooperation of all kinds. They advocate violence: In 2014, Trump said that "you'll have to have riots to go back to where we used to be, when America was great."

Sometimes they claim to be Christian, but just as often they are nihilists and cynics. Their ideology, sometimes formalized and sometimes not, opposes homosexuality, racial integration, religious tolerance and human rights.

The Populist International holds these goals to be more important than prosperity, more important than economic growth, more important than democracy itself. Like the parties that once formed the Comintern, they are eager to destroy existing institutions — from independent courts and media to international alliances and treaties — to obtain them. This week, Britain's Daily Mail, a newspaper that propagates the ideas of the Populist International, actually denounced three high-court judges as "Enemies of the People" because they decreed that Britain's exit from the European Union would require parliamentary consultation. Trump is only one of many politicians — Poland's Jaroslaw Kaczynski, Hungary's Viktor Orban — who have launched attacks on the principles of their own constitutions.

Like their Comintern predecessors, the Populist International also understands that there is much to be gained by mutual support. German Christian Democrats would never have dreamed of campaigning on behalf of British Tories. And although they had much in common, Tories didn't intervene directly on behalf of U.S. Republicans. By contrast, Nigel Farage, the leader of the UK Independence Party, has openly campaigned for Trump, even appearing in a "spin room" to plug the Republican nominee after one of his debates with Hillary Clinton. Geert Wilders, the xenophobic Dutch politician, showed up at the Republican National Convention, where instead of observing, as a Dutch Christian Democrat would have done, he agitated on behalf of Trump, too. All of the populist parties and newspapers use the narratives put out by Sputnik, the Russian news service that serves as an endless source of conspiracy theories and fake news. This week, a fake account of a refugee in Austria acquitted of raping a child — originally broadcast on Russian state TV — was repeated by Russian President Vladimir Putin and then across Europe, including (again) in the Daily Mail.

All the signs are that the movement is still growing. If Trump loses, the story isn't over: His campaign will no doubt metastasize into a television channel and a news network, and will continue to spread. But his

failure will encourage the antidotes — the citizens' parties, based on ideas rather than charisma, the independent journalists, the democracy movements — that have begun to emerge.

And if Trump wins? The Populist International will be invigorated, not just in the United States but around the world. Trump will be its leader, his daughter Ivanka will be its heir apparent, and liberal democracy, and the West as we know it, may cease to exist. Think about that before you vote.

The myth of Trump's working class support

Commentary on the US election has often asserted that Trump galvanises a working class base 'left behind' by globalisation. This has achieved the status of an unchallenged cliché.

However, electoral exit polls demonstrate otherwise. Those earning under 50k were more likely to support Clinton, while those earning over 50k were more likely to support Trump.

White, older men were the likeliest demographic to support Trump. While Trump's right-wing populism certainly plays on economic anxieties, his appeal is primarily along racial rather than class lines.

For exit polls see:

<http://edition.cnn.com/election/results/exit-polls>

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One Nation legitimises fascist ideas – The time to stop Hansonism is now!

This article by Debbie Brennan was originally published by the Freedom Socialist Party (Australia).

Debbie represents Radical Women in CARF and is a community member of the National Union of Workers.

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“I’m back — but not alone.” Pauline Hanson, leader of the extreme-right One Nation party, made a parliamentary comeback in Australia’s federal election this past July. These taunting words are from her “maiden” speech to Parliament on September 15.

In 1996 Hanson was elected to the House of Representatives, but lost her seat two years later. Back then, she said Asians were taking over the country. Twenty years later, she warns, “Now we are in danger of being swamped by Muslims”—who, she claims, will commit terror and impose sharia law.

It gets worse

As Hanson says, she’s not alone. She’s one of four newly elected One Nation Senators: two, including herself, from Queensland and the others from New South Wales and Western Australia.

Pauline Hanson and the One Nation party she formed in 1997 are notorious for their racism. In her first 1996 parliamentary speech, Hanson went on the attack against First Nations people, who, she stated, are privileged over whites. Asians were not only “swamping” Australia, they weren’t assimilating. She praised Labor Party leader, Arthur Calwell, who said in 1955: “Japan, India, Burma, Ceylon and every new African nation are fiercely anti-white and anti one another. Do we want or need any of these people here? I am one red-blooded Australian who says no and who speaks for 90 percent of Australians.”

Fast forward to 2016: Asians are replaced with Muslims. In 1996, Hanson called for a “radical review” of immigration and the abolition of multiculturalism. Today, she demands that Muslim immigration be stopped and the burqa banned.

More than racist

The notion of race was invented in early capitalism to justify slavery and plunder. In times of class conflict—like now—racism has been indispensable to capitalists as a weapon to split the working class and destabilise resistance. Islamophobia is that weapon now. But sexism, nationalism and anti-unionism are also instruments of control, and Hanson’s oratory is full of it.

Hanson’s close connection with men’s rights groups is reflected in One Nation’s policies. Since 1996, she has called for the scrapping of the Family Court—claiming a bias toward women who “make frivolous claims and believe they have the sole right to children.” She further blames the court for pushing non-custodial fathers into poverty and causing many to suicide. One Nation would force women to stay in miserable, often violent, relationships. Hanson instructs women to “put your differences aside, make your peace and come to agreements outside of the law courts.” If not, any woman going to court for custody better be ready to pay all costs if she loses.

She slams people on welfare, especially single mothers for “having more children just to maintain their welfare payments.” One Nation would deny payment increases to women after the first child. In Hanson’s words: “Get a job and start taking responsibility for your own actions.”

Hanson calls for an Australian identity card to access welfare, healthcare, education or any other tax-funded service, and she defies “do-gooders” to “complain about people’s privacy.”

In September, Hanson gave a thinly veiled attack on unionism when she accused “overpaid public servants” of bludging off the budget. Throughout the country, public sector workers have been in a tough three-year battle against the federal government over wages, which remain frozen, and the shredding of hard-won conditions. Community and Public Sector Union members in the Department of Immigration and Border Protection are planning another week of industrial

action. The potential power that public workers hold in their collective hands is massive. This fight is historic: these unionists are taking on the State, and the government wants to crush them. No wonder the rabidly anti-union Minister for Employment Michaelia Cash hugged Hanson at the conclusion of her speech.

A former fish and chip shop owner, Hanson typifies small capitalists' contempt for workers' rights and hatred toward militant unionism. In a recent media interview, she said, "we need to protect the small end of town, the small contractors and subbies so that they have a chance to get jobs and not be bullied by unions."

The nationalist fantasy

Hanson's style may not be Donald Trump's, but, like him, she appeals to prejudices to answer why life for most people has become so insecure and hard. As the global economy disintegrates and the capitalist class foists the burden onto workers and the oppressed, these far-right demagogues offer up scapegoats—served with a big dollop of nationalism.

Hanson paints Australia as expanses of farmland and infrastructure, Australian owned; a land of families, nuclear, Christian, Australian born and assimilated. The school day starts with raising the Australian flag and singing the national anthem. TVs in homes and pubs across the country show Australian athletes competing for their country and saluting the flag from the victory podium.

She condemns "foreign" capital, especially Chinese, which she says is buying up Australia's farms, real estate and resources. These investors, she claims, put housing prices beyond Australians' reach. She denounces big business for being behind Australia's intake of immigrants.

The illusion she constructs is of a hardworking nation exploited by foreign capital. This idea isn't new—fascists used it in post-World War I Germany and Italy to deflect attention from local industrialists who backed the unleashing of jackboots on a working class that was in revolt. Today, Hanson directs the attention of those attracted to her vile ideas away from the source of their problems: the global capitalist system itself.

Understanding the threat

Hanson's September parliamentary speech had the eerie ring of fascism. Her inflammatory calls to strip women on welfare of their rights to independence and reproductive choice, her anti-union comments and demonisation of Muslims and immigrants are classic

far-right speak. But is this fascism?

Fascism is more than a vicious ideology. It's is a movement, built to destroy the capacity of the working class to organise and revolt. Fascism's social base is the middle class—small business people like Hanson—which, caught between the two powerful classes of capital and labour, will flip to whichever side looks likely to win over the other.

In her speech, Hanson was appealing to the middle class as well as less conscious working class folks looking for scapegoats to blame. In so doing, she legitimises fascist ideas, creating fertile ground in which a jackbooted fascist movement can take root and grow. One Nation is well positioned to coalesce the far right, inside and outside of Parliament, including neo-Nazis forces, which until now have been fragmented.

Hanson is well connected with this milieu. She has spoken at Reclaim Australia rallies. Leading members of the neo-Nazi United Patriots Front campaigned for her in the federal election. UPF even offered to be her bodyguards. Hanson is also friendly with the fascist Party for Freedom. These are the known connections.

If this leads to the cohering of a mass movement aimed at crushing the ability of the working class to organise, we're dealing with fascism. While such a movement has not yet emerged, the danger is all too real. And Hanson is a contributor, encouraging more assaults on Muslims, immigrants, women and unionists—legislatively and physically. The need to countermobilise in our streets and communities—as we've done from Melbourne to Bendigo—remains urgent, because the threat could escalate.

Build the united front

Since Reclaim Australia first attempted to rally at Melbourne's Federation Square in April 2015, Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) has countered these ultra-right and fascist groups whenever and wherever they've gathered. This united front of unionists, feminists, socialists, anarchists and Aboriginal justice activists has successfully prevented them from growing into a movement.

As the global economy continues to sink and the need to resist intensifies, a fascist movement could materialise—unless there's a strong working class-led movement to stop it. The time to build this anti-fascist movement is right now. The CARF united front needs to grow into a force of today's and tomorrow's scapegoats—Muslims, women, First Nations, LGBTQI, refugees and immigrants, unions, radicals, welfare recipients, the homeless and unemployed.

Socialists retain seats in Australian local body elections

By Bronwen Beechey, Fightback (Aotearoa/New Zealand).

Local body politics has been traditionally regarded as being about roads, rubbish and rates. However, empowering communities is an important factor in building resistance to neo-liberal capitalism. In Australia, a number of socialist councillors have been standing up for the rights of those usually ignored by local bodies.

In Victoria, recent local council elections saw two socialists re-elected. The Socialist Alliance's candidate Sue Bolton, standing in the North-East Ward of Moreland City Council, was re-elected with the second-highest primary vote in the ward. In Yarra City Council, socialist Stephen Jolly came first in the Landridge Ward and was re-elected to a fourth term on council.

Bolton faced a tough battle, with 20 candidates (seven Labor, three Greens and four right-wing independents) standing for four positions. The elections were based on compulsory preferential voting, with other candidates swapping preferences and none directing preferences to Bolton. In the end, second preferences from mostly Green and Labor voters were the deciding factor in Bolton's re-election. Her primary vote was 13.3 per cent, compared to the 9.5 per cent she won when first elected in 2012.

Bolton also faced a campaign against her by the conservative right, local traders and the Herald-Sun newspaper over her opposition to racism. In May this year, she initiated a rally against racism in the ethnically diverse suburb of Coburg, calling for an end to the closure of aboriginal communities, a treaty between the government and aboriginal people, allowing refugees held in detention to settle in Australia and an end to Islamophobia. While the rally successfully attracted several hundred people, media attention focused on a smaller confrontation between racist groups and anti-racist activists which occurred nearby. The Murdoch-owned Herald Sun took the lead in blaming Bolton for the violence, although she had neither organised nor endorsed the action. A number

of local traders also blamed her for loss of business due to the police closing off the Coburg mall. During the election campaign, a number of Bolton's election posters were defaced.

On her Facebook page, following her victory, Bolton commented:

"The racists and the Herald Sun don't win all of the time. The racists wanted to make me pay for organising a rally against racism by campaigning to vote me off council. They systematically defaced and ripped down my posters around the centre of Coburg. But they didn't win. I make no apology for standing up against racism. We need to make a stand against racism wherever we are."

Bolton's election campaign was run on a tiny budget and relied on street stalls and door-knocking to get the message out. She commented:

"There were so many different parts of the community who were involved in helping my re-election campaign - Socialist Alliance members, independent socialists, trade unionists, anti-development activists, residents networks, First Nations activists, the Muslim community, Urdu communities, the Nepalese community, the Kurdish community, environmentalists, pensioner groups, parents of children with disabilities, the Itiki sports club and many others."

As well as her stand against racism, Bolton's achievements on council include reinstatement of after-hours respite care for parents of children with disabilities which the council had cut, reinstatement of the council's climate budget, preventing the sale of a significant Aboriginal site, and opposing the sale of land to private developers rather than being used for public housing. She also helped found a local campaign against the East-West link, a proposed freeway with tunnels that would have cut through parkland and caused increased traffic congestion in Moreland and surrounding areas. Along with other public transport



groups, the campaign was successful in stopping the proposed link. Bolton also held regular ward meetings and gained a reputation as an honest councillor who “got things done”.

In a video for her campaign, Bolton said that the best part of her role on council was “being able to work with residents to create community campaigns, so that residents get treated seriously by council. People get bureaucratically dismissed as not having genuine or realistic concerns, so people often feel very powerless or disenchanted. As an activist councillor you can help people get organized, and also raise residents’ issues within the council, and often get victories, which actually helps the residents’ campaign to move forward and win their demand.”

Stephen Jolly was first elected to the Yarra Council in 2008, and has been re-elected twice. He has stated that he wants the area to be a community “where families and those on low incomes can afford to live and more easily access services, like child care”. Like Bolton, Jolly has been active in campaigning against the East-West Link, against the privatisation of services like rubbish collection, and for more public housing. He has also been active in campaigning against racism, and has been subjected to harassment and death threats by racist organizations. Jolly was a long-time member of the Socialist Party (a Trotskyist group affiliated to the Committee for a Workers International) but resigned earlier this year along with a number of other members, over allegations that the organisation had covered up allegations of abuse of a female member.

The six other socialist candidates who ran on the same ticket as Jolly also received a high level of support, although not enough to be elected to council. Four Green members were also elected, meaning that with Jolly’s support they could form a majority on the 9-person council. Jolly told Green Left Weekly that he is keen to work with the Greens and called for public discussions on a common program.

Socialist Alliance also has another local councillor, Sam Wainwright, who was elected to the Fremantle City Council in Western Australia in 2009, and re-elected in 2013 with an outright majority of 58.33% in his Hilton ward. Wainwright has been involved in campaigning against a number of proposed freeway projects and for expanded public transport services, telling Green Left Weekly in 2014: “What is called transport planning in this country is mostly endless subsidies to the road transport, road construction and fossil fuel industries - at literally any cost to the public purse, environment, urban form and human health. Stopping endless freeway construction is not some

NIMBY thing, it’s about creating people-friendly cities.”

Wainwright also campaigned for better conditions for council workers, and was successful in getting the council to adopt a policy that recognised union rights and permanent work instead of contracts.

Earlier this year, Wainwright successfully moved that Fremantle council support protests for refugee rights, call for the end of the offshore mandatory detention regime and boat “turnbacks”, and boycott any companies who are contracted to run detention centres.

The success of the socialist councillors is due to a number of factors. All are long-time activists with a history of living in and involvement in their local communities. They have all been uncompromising in defending those communities from cuts to services, inappropriate developments, gentrification and racism, and in standing up to attacks from right wing groups and media. At a time when many on the left are feeling demoralised and isolated, their success shows that it is possible to gain support for openly socialist politics among ordinary working people and in diverse communities.

For more information on the socialist councillors:

Sue Bolton:

<https://www.facebook.com/SueBoltonForMoreland/>

Stephen Jolly:

<https://www.facebook.com/stephen.jolly1>

Sam Wainwright:

<https://www.facebook.com/FreoReport/?fref=ts>

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Green Vomit and statistical nonsense: the lies you hear about immigration and the Auckland housing crisis

Article by Tim Leadbeater, originally published by the International Socialist Organisation (Aotearoa/New Zealand)

A few days ago the Labour party announced a new policy of increasing police numbers by 1000. I groaned at this news but it didn't really surprise me. Then yesterday I heard of the new Greens policy on immigration, with James Shaw calling for a drastic reduction in numbers. Is New Zealand First calling the shots here, aided and encouraged by a compliant and uncritical media happy to jump on the anti-immigrant bandwagon? The Greens and Labour will almost certainly need the support of NZF to form a government next year, and Winston really just hates those hippy-dippy lentil munching do gooders. James Shaw knows this, yet needs to send a very clear signal to Peters that the Greens are willing to compromise. Immigration is a hot topic, and Shaw can easily frame the issue in terms of "sustainability" and "infrastructure". No need for racist dog-whistles or Chinese sounding surnames, this is Sensible and Practical Greens policy, easily digested by sensitive liberals turned off by the crude nationalist appeals of NZF.

We think that the country needs a more sustainable immigration policy, so what we'd do is set a variable approvals target based on a percentage of the overall population. That would be at about 1 percent of the population, which is historically how fast New Zealand's population has grown."

Mr Shaw says the policy would even out peaks and troughs in annual migration numbers.

"You've also got to cater for changes in infrastructure, and because our population has historically grown at about 1 percent the country is set up to absorb that," he says.

"Suddenly double that number, and you've got a problem like we've got at the moment, where you actually can't meet the demand.

Hmmmm. Sounds sensible enough. It's not that we are racist or anything mean and horrible like that, it is just that we have looked at it very carefully and the numbers just don't add up. One percent is all that the infrastructure can handle - just look at the housing crisis for proof, even if we wanted to we just couldn't build enough new houses that fast. The government isn't switched on like we are, they are letting in huge numbers and now people are sleeping in their cars! Etc, etc.

Curious about this one percent growth claim, I searched for the population data on Statistics New Zealand and came up with this graph (next page).

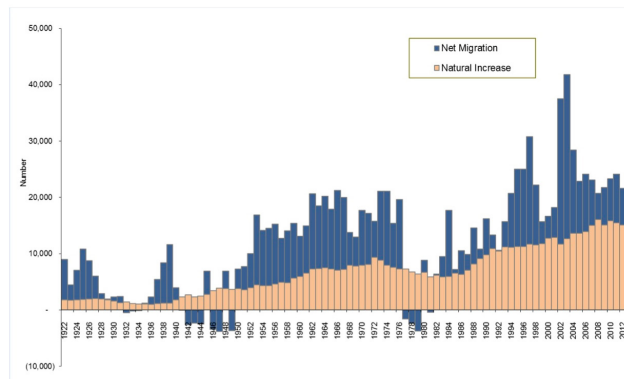
It is sort of true that the New Zealand population has grown at around 1% per year, as you can see for the period from the 1990s up to 2015, the line fluctuates above and below 1%. If you were a statistician paid by Winston Peters you could cut the time period to 1980 and onwards, and very easily draw a steadily increasing trendline through the periodic peaks and troughs. Look! The line is going up, we don't have enough houses! The line must be flat, we must flatten the line! One percent is an absolute maximum!

The really strange and scary thing is to consider just how New Zealand survived throughout those extreme and rabbit-warren like years after the second world war. Those baby boomers were just popping them out without any consideration for New Zealand's fragile infrastructure, pushing 3% for a couple of years and then a period of about 20 years with that line well in the red zone (and it was so sudden! How did they cope?). Then there was that period in the late 60s and early 70s when the line went into the 2% Danger Zone for about 3 years. Those damn hippies, what were they thinking?

Cheering for the Greens new anti-immigrant stance, Martyn Bradbury from the Daily Blog conjures up some even more gratuitously false statistics to make the case:

Here is the grim truth about our current immigration settings. It's not the 70,000-90,000 who

Components of Growth 1922-2012



become permanent residents that we need to be concerned about and it's not their families joining them that we need to be worried with either, the real problem is our scam work/study visa scheme that sees 250 000 desperate students coming to NZ for bullshit 'education' programs that end up as bonded servitude with exploitative employers who hold onto their passports.

These 250 000 work hard jobs, many on less than minimum wage and pay tens of thousands for education schemes that are glorified english courses all for the promise of becoming permanent residents.

A quarter of a million students paying tens of thousands of dollars to learn English, and getting exploited at the same time by ruthless bosses! And all of them putting massive stress on our infrastructure! They'll never ever go back to where they came from because their bosses have stolen their passports!! We'll be doing the country a favour as well as fighting for worker's rights if we just stop them staying here! A double whammy:

We need to stop exploiting these people and stop promising them permanent residence via education. If they wish to come here for education, fine, that's their decision, but putting in place the pathway from education or employment to residency is exploitative and creating huge pressures on an infrastructure that can't take anymore.

When I first read this blog I was struck by the twisted moral "logic" of Bradbury's anti-immigrant stance. Like James Shaw, he wants to save the 'infrastructure' from the hordes of foreigners swamping our fair land. But he wants to present this as simultaneously saving the immigrants from exploitative bosses. If only they knew how exploitative and nasty kiwi bosses were, they would never have come in the first place. (Working conditions in places like India, of course, being obvi-

ously superior). I started pondering the strange and only barely coherent motivations for this 'argument', then my head started to hurt so I gave up. What then struck me was Bradbury's figures. Where on earth did he get that figure of 250,000 'desperate students'?

He links to another blog by Mike Treen, which states that "250,000 people are granted student or temporary work visas each year.". There are no sources given for any of these numbers, so I dug around the Statistics New Zealand and MBIE sites for up to date data. Treen's figure of 250,000 is most likely based on data for the 2014/2015 year, in which 84,856 international students were approved for New Zealand courses, and 170,814 people were granted a work visa.

Let's start with the temporary work visas. It is difficult to know exactly how many of these people are or were international students. There are several categories of temporary visa, and a set of complex rules and regulations surrounding each category. I didn't spend enough time on this problem to come up with an exact number, but I did take note of the clearly spelt out fact that the biggest single source country of those gaining temporary work visas was the UK. And the fact that the biggest visa category (61,404 people) was 'Working Holiday Schemes' (think backpackers). How many people were granted visas in the 'Work to Study' category? Exactly 13,688. There are other categories international students might have applied under, but this is the most obvious candidate.

How about those 84,856 international students? Again I didn't dig long enough in the data to work out how many of these students worked, or intended to work after studying. Fairly obviously the 18% of them who were under 16 will not be working, which leaves us with 69,582 who might get part time work alongside their studies. There is no denying that for a significant chunk of these international students (and ex-students), exploitative and often illegal work practices are a major problem. But the numbers involved are nowhere near the idiotically false figure of 250,000

which Bradbury confidently puts forward without any reservations.

Are these just careless mistakes made by a blogger who thrives on the hot air of passing controversies, or is there something else going on here? I'm aware that Bradbury operates a blog rather than an academic journal, but the brazen sloppiness regarding statistics is surely a big issue. The internet allows you to check numbers very quickly and easily, so why not back up your statistics with actual sources?

There are definitely some impressive numbers out there which at first glance appear to back up the argument for cutting immigration. According to Statistics New Zealand, surely a source far more credible than Bradbury's blog or Green Party press releases, Auckland's population grew by a massive 2.9% in the 2014 - 2015 year. This growth accounted for over half of the population growth for the entire country. Alongside these facts it would not be a difficult task to present a series of familiar and undeniable truths about the problems with Auckland's infrastructure: the housing crisis, inadequate public transport, congested roads and so on. Shortly after the release of this data in July 2015, there was a Stuff article with the headline "NZ migration boom nears 60,000 a year, as Indians and returning Kiwis flood in". Like many other similarly hysterical media reports, immigration is presented as a major causal factor of the housing crisis. With almost no attention given in the mainstream media to alternative points of view which question this received wisdom, the truth of the claim 'immigrants cause housing crisis' has apparently become established through constant repetition. In this environment, it is possible to make outlandishly false statistical claims about immigration without stirring any controversy.

The most insightful piece I have read about this issue is Peter Nunns' transport blog article 'Why is Auckland Growing?'. Nunns points out that net migration is extremely volatile, being dependent on both the numbers of Aucklanders leaving for places such as Australia and the numbers of people coming in from overseas. Much more constant and statistically significant is the natural population increase due to Aucklanders having babies. If we can get past the hysteria of the 2015 figures and look at the past 24 years for a broader and more robust view of the situation, the statistics tell a different story: in 18 of those 24 years, natural increase was a bigger contributor to growth than net migration. The significance of this is that even if regulations on immigration were tightened considerably, overall long term population growth would be roughly the same as if the status quo rules remained. Nunns demonstrates this with a simulation comparing a projected Auckland

population growth with a 50% reduction of net migration to one without such a reduction. His prediction is that by the year 2043, the 50% reduction version of Auckland would have a population of about 2.1 million, whereas the status quo Auckland would have a population of about 2.2 million. The conclusion he draws is that Auckland faces some major tasks around preparing its infrastructure for population growth, so it needs to do things like build more houses. Cutting immigration is simply not a solution.

I can't resist another conclusion: none of this pedantic analysing of facts and figures really matters all that much. What does matter is all those times you get on board an Auckland train in the morning and there are no seats left, and you are surrounded by lots of Indian and Asian young people. When you get on the bus and have to listen to all those conversations in Chinese. Then you get off on Dominion Road and basically every sign is written in Chinese, and they don't even bother translating them into English. All those bright and hard working Asian students who get most of the academic prizes in the secondary schools. These very pertinent experiences and anecdotes build on each other, so when you read the outlandish and ridiculous sentence "the real problem is our scam work/study visa scheme that sees 250 000 desperate students coming to NZ for bullshit 'education' programs that end up as bonded servitude with exploitative employers who hold onto their passports" you don't even blink, it just sounds about right.

As a socialist I am for internationalism, solidarity and a world without borders. In this article however I have restrained myself from using any of the perspectives, values or arguments which inform these positions. The mainstream left in New Zealand appears to be lacking in both statistical literacy and the spirit of the famous phrase 'Workers of the World, Unite!'. If we can't communicate to them the spirit of solidarity, the least we can do is point out their mathematical failure.

Auckland's no-choice elections: blue-greens and conservative leftists

By Daphne Lawless, Fightback (Aotearoa/New Zealand)

The election of former Labour Party leader Phil Goff as mayor of Auckland on October 9, by a margin of 75,000 votes over his nearest challenger, will at best have provoked “half a cheer” from people who want a sustainable, equal, democratic and liveable future for Auckland.

The mayoral election was probably a foregone conclusion once the Auckland right wing failed to agree on a challenger and ran three separate campaigns for Mayor. But even if you added all the votes together for business figures Victoria Crone and John Palino and career National Party hack Mark Thomas, Goff still came out with a clear majority.

Phil Goff was one of the eminences grises of the neo-liberal takeover of the Labour Party in the 1980s. As Minister of Education he was the first to impose tertiary tuition fees. He spent 30 years as a reliable but inoffensive member of the right wing of the Labour Party caucus and caused the National Government no problems during his single election as Opposition Leader in 2011.

Goff's campaign to succeed the centre-leftist Len Brown as Mayor of Auckland was similarly marked by carefully avoiding taking any stands. In Labour-leaning areas of Auckland, his campaign signs carried slogans like “Let's sort out transport”. In the National-

leaning zones, they said “Let's get council spending under control”. Goff's honestly described his campaign strategy to the NZ Herald on September 9, distancing himself from the sex scandal which dogged Len Brown's second term:

“I've slept with one woman for 45 years - that's all,” he declares when Sainsbury asks him about potential scandal. “Why am I so boring?” should be the question, he suggests.¹

The sole element of interest in the mayoral election was the late run of 22-year-old Chloë Swarbrick.² A qualified lawyer running on a left-liberal platform which took clear stances where Goff fudged, she was initially ignored by the mainstream media for whom her age was considered an obvious disqualifying factor. Nonetheless, a groundswell on social media eventually propelled her to 3rd place in the election, beating two of the mainstream conservative candidates. The Wireless website reported on 9 October:

Chloë doesn't own a home, she takes public transport and she's in \$43,000 of student loan debt. “I'm not just some rich kid from Epsom. I've had no financial support since I was 17,” she says.³

¹ http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=11706915

² <http://www.chloeforauckland.co.nz>

³ <http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/the-election-might-be-over-but-don-t-expect-chloe-swarbrick-to-disappear>

An aerial, black-and-white photograph of a city, likely New York City, showing a dense urban grid with numerous buildings and streets. The city is surrounded by water, with a large body of water visible in the upper right corner. A large, bold, red 'SOLD' stamp is superimposed over the center of the image, tilted slightly to the right. The stamp is enclosed in a thin red rectangular border. The word 'SOLD' is in a thick, sans-serif font, with the letters appearing to have a slightly distressed or textured surface. The overall image has a high-contrast, grainy quality, typical of older aerial photography.

SOLD

As @tiredsounds put it on Twitter: “Swarbrick shows that soft-left but sensible ideas, if not attached to someone with a rap sheet that makes NZers hate them, can feasibly contest elections.”

Auckland's growth: UP or Out?

Leftists and socialists might have wished for more candidates like Chloë Swarbrick in the elections for the Council Governing Body and Auckland's 21 local boards. Not only because of her appealing personal qualities, but because her youth-focussed campaign drew attention to the fault-lines in Auckland caused by the ongoing housing crisis. As Simon Collins reported in the Herald on April 14:

Young people in their early twenties are now the most likely age group to be living in overcrowded conditions, as Auckland's unaffordable housing crisis bites hardest for young adults. A quarter (25.2 per cent) of all young people aged 20 to 24 in Auckland are now officially considered to be in “overcrowded” housing in the 2013 Census, up from 23.6 per cent in the previous Census in 2006.⁴

One reason for the overall dullness of the election might be that the most controversial and important issue for Auckland's future – the Unitary Plan – was endorsed by the Governing Body before the election. There has been a lot of misinformation circulated about Auckland's Unitary Plan on both sides of the political spectrum, so it's probably worth setting out some facts.

The purpose of the Unitary Plan was to replace the jumble of old zoning schemes and development plans left over from the previous Auckland city, district and regional councils into a single “rulebook for Auckland development”. That is, the Unitary Plan was never going to build a single house – it was solely a question of setting rules on what houses and other buildings and infrastructure could be built, where. As urban design student Niko Elsen explained on The Spinoff:

The Unitary Plan lifts up and loosens that web of

rules so more homes are allowed to be built. It doesn't actually build homes – that's for architects, developers and the Government, but it's a super important step to let them get on with it.⁵

Unfortunately, given New Zealand's centralised political system, radical measures which could actually reduce housing costs – such as the 50% “crash” in house prices proposed by Green Party leader Metiria Turei⁶, or a massive build of State housing for rental and not for speculation – were not among the options for the Auckland Council. The question that the Unitary Plan was to solve was more a question of urban form. Given Auckland's continued exponential growth, to the point where it now embodies something like 1/3 of the population of Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Unitary Plan could have decisive influence on what kind of city it will become. Would it continue its current growth pattern of low-rise urban sprawl, with single-dwelling houses on “traditional Kiwi” lots spreading out north and south over productive farmland? Or would “high-density” living – apartments and townhouses – become more widespread?

In a previous Fightback article, I made an argument that urban intensification and an end to sprawl is not only the pro-worker solution, but the pro-environment solution.⁷ Energy-efficient housing close to reliable public transport routes not only requires less infrastructure but has a much lower “carbon footprint” than Auckland's traditional housing model – or would do so, given proper planning and design. This analysis was matched by lobby groups in the election such as Generation Zero and Greater Auckland, the latter being the advocacy group behind the popular Transportblog.

Left-Right bloc against intensification

As I said in the article referenced above, it is to be expected for the traditional Auckland right to oppose intensification – both because of the downward pressure on their property values, and because of the influx it might cause of “undesirables” into the “leafy suburbs” which they traditionally monopolise. And

⁴ http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=11622374

⁵ <http://thespinoff.co.nz/auckland-2016/11-08-2016/thank-god-someone-finally-explained-the-unitary-plan-in-gif-form/>

⁶ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/82525588/Green-Party-calling-for-house-prices-to-be-cut-in-half-over-time-La-bour-says-no-way>

⁷ <https://fightback.org.nz/2015/02/13/urban-housing-is-an-ecosocialist-issue/>

certainly this was the position of such traditional-Right councillors such as George Wood (North Shore), Cameron Brewer (representing the Remuera and Kohimarama areas) and Dick Quax (Howick).

It might be surprising, then – if you don't follow Auckland politics – to know that, in the Council debates and in the election that followed, the spectrum of opinion generally considered "centre-left" ranged from deep suspicion about the Unitary Plan to outright opposition. Daily Blog supremo Martyn "Bomber" Bradbury called the UP a "scam"⁸; perennial mayoral candidate Penny Bright described it as the "Lunatic Plan" and accused Generation Zero of being "the youth wing of the Property Council"⁹.

More seriously, left-leaning politicians representing the central suburbs – in particularly those attached to the City Vision ticket – were in the forefront of those opposing the Unitary Plan's vision for a more intensified, compact Auckland in its planning stages. City Vision councillors Mike Lee and Cathy Casey both voted for the Council to withdraw its initial submission to the Independent Hearings Panel calling for more intensification.¹⁰ While Cathy Casey eventually supported the UP at the final vote – saying she wanted her children to be able to grow up and live in her local area – Mike Lee kept up his opposition to the last, voting against more aspects of the UP than any other councillor.¹¹ This UP-critical stance was supported by other City Vision candidates in the election, like Casey's running mate Peter Haynes. In contrast, Labour-aligned councillors in western and southern Auckland were generally supportive of the UP.

Mike Lee – the King Canute of the Auckland Left

So what exactly was City Vision's problem with the UP? For a lot of traditional, older leftists, the answer was simply a personal preference for the low-rise sprawl which characterises today's Auckland. In one Facebook discussion I had with an opponent of the UP, their position eventually summed up to "I don't like those apartments downtown". Clearly, radical urbanists need to work harder to promote the ecosocialist case

for high-density housing against the arguments of what I have previously described as "the conservative left".¹²

But is personal preference for things the way they've traditionally been really the reason for the anger against the UP on the central Auckland centre-Left? Let's examine closely a few of Mike Lee's posts on his own blog, reprinted in the glossy freebie Ponsonby News. From February:

The council's massive un-notified change to zonings is essentially another example of business deregulation, which would make Auckland even more of a free-for-all for the development lobby. Interestingly some young 'climate change' activists lined up with big business to support the changes. 'Generation Zero' argues that the all-out assault on the historic garden suburbs of Auckland is a good for young people, taking as an article of faith vague promises from the developers of 'affordable housing' close to the desirable city centre. They also believe a further round of intensification will force more people to use public transport. Sadly they have bought into the endless growth ideology and are not too bothered about the wider environmental impacts of overcrowding (sewage disposal for instance) nor indeed, as they freely admit, about the loss of people's democratic rights and due process.

Lee goes on to criticise "the weird assumption that unsustainable growth and urban overcrowding is the formula for quality of life and better public transport".¹³ In the second article from May, which concerns his opposition to a Government Special Housing Area (SHA) in the suburb of Herne Bay, Lee argues:

In regard to Auckland's housing problem, government policies stoking up immigration into Auckland (demand) and its reluctance to build state houses (supply) are also contributing factors...

While population-driven pressure on the property market is a feature of cities in other countries – the difference is that in New Zealand a disproportionate amount of growth is loaded onto one city –

⁸ <http://thedailyblog.co.nz/2016/08/01/its-official-the-unitary-plan-is-a-scam/>

⁹ <http://thespinoff.co.nz/featured/30-09-2016/an-open-letter-from-penny-bright-to-the-spinoff/>

¹⁰ <http://www.metromag.co.nz/city-life/simon-wilsons-auckland/the-miserables-of-kohimarama/>

¹¹ <http://transportblog.co.nz/2016/08/23/how-councillors-voted-on-the-unitary-plan/>

¹² I developed the concept of "conservative leftism" in a previous article: <https://fightback.org.nz/2016/02/15/against-conservative-leftism/> It refers to the trend for activists from the traditional

¹³ <http://www.mikelee.co.nz/2016/02/too-bloody-big-for-its-boots-auckland-council-arrogance-sparks-citizens-backlash/> left to take up reactionary positions in opposition to neoliberalism, which include the anti-urbanist and populationist/anti-immigration positions discussed in this article.

Auckland. And Auckland ratepayers are expected to pay for more and more for increasingly expensive infrastructure.

While I support intensification over suburban sprawl (subject of course to the availability of adequate infrastructure) the current debate assumes that Auckland must continue to grow disproportionately. ...

With State Highways and motorways increasingly congested on the suburban fringes and sewerage capacity under pressure in places like the historic western bays, such growth is neither environmentally sustainable – nor in the end affordable. An intelligent government-led balanced population and development policy for the whole of New Zealand is what is needed.¹⁴

There are several issues that need unpacking here. Firstly, Lee makes some nods in the direction of being opposed to “deregulation” and “property developers” - phrases which would evoke an instant knee-jerk response as Bad Things among traditional leftists. We might wonder firstly how “property developer” got the same emotional loading as “drug dealer”, why this particular sector of the capitalist economy is being stigmatised, especially when housing is the number one issue facing us. (Penny Bright’s jibes at Generation Zero show the same scapegoating move.)

But let’s look more closely about what is being deregulated here. Lee claims to be defending the “property rights” of his constituents. But he’s not. Rezoning under the UP actually gives property owners more rights about what to do with their own property. What Lee is defending is restrictions on what can be built and where. These restrictions on property rights act to maintain property values – and the personal preferences of Lee’s mega-wealthy constituents.

Herne Bay is probably the most “exclusive” suburb in the central Auckland region, with an average house price now at a whopping \$2 million.¹⁵ The expensive suburbs are that way because that’s where people most want to live – central, with good public transport, with views of the sea and in walking distance of cultural and work opportunities. It is precisely in

these areas where people want to live the most, that intensified housing is most needed! The argument that “leafy” suburbs must be defended by restricting them to existing residents and property owners is nothing but a defence of unearned privilege. The benefits of such suburbs should be available to all social classes.

Similarly, Lee’s argument against the Herne Bay SHA is ostensibly based on the inadequacy of wastewater facilities for fitting any significant amount of new homes in the Herne Bay region. But infrastructure can be built and improved, given sufficient funding and political will. As one US Twitter commentator put it: “Something’s fishy when people oppose new homes within walking distance of jobs and transit on environmental grounds.”

¹⁶ Lee takes great offence at being accused of being a NIMBY (someone who wants development “not in my back yard”). But the question arises – if intensification is not to happen in Herne Bay, then where?

It’s true that, absent other interventions, intensified housing in the most desirable suburbs would still be unaffordable for most working people. But as mentioned above, the affordability issue cannot be solved at the level of the UP, which only controls types of development. If the UP were to leave the “leafy suburbs” alone, then any intensified housing would have to be concentrated in existing working class/affordable suburbs. This would of course replicate the phenomenon of British “estates”, French “banlieues” and US “projects” - all of which have become bywords for terrible slums. The socialist approach should surely be one which breaks down social apartheid – as the original NZ State Housing project of the 1930s did by “pepper-potting” affordable housing rather than concentrating it in single areas.

Lee’s final and most basic argument – to which his special pleading on behalf of his super-wealthy constituents takes second place – is an argument against “Auckland’s disproportionate growth”. That is, that the problem would not exist if Auckland were not growing so quickly. To show that this is not just one individual talking, this concept was endorsed by another elected official from City Vision – Albert-Eden Local Board member Graeme Easte – in a comment on a Transportblog post:

¹⁴ <http://www.mikelee.co.nz/2016/05/aucklands-disproportionate-growth-not-sustainable-nor-affordable/>

¹⁵ http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=11463083

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/justupthepike/status/785548387592667136>

I advocate a national population strategy to share growth more evenly throughout NZ. ...The so-called 'zombie towns' are very real, as I have personally discussed with the despairing mayors of a number of them. I fully realize how difficult it will be to incentivize more business activity (jobs) in the provinces but this is the only realistic way to persuade more people, especially the young, to remain in or relocate to the smaller centres. I have been attacked on this blog for previously suggesting such policies but remain firmly of the view that this would be a win-win for all concerned ... Auckland would be better able to address growth if there were just a bit less of it while the rest of New Zealand would actually have some growth.¹⁷

There is room for argument as to whether Auckland-centric urbanisation is preferable from an ecosocialist point of view than encouraging similar intensified urban living elsewhere in the country. But the more immediate question is – exactly what do Lee or Easte think can be done about this at local body level? The problem of population growth will not go away if Council simply refuses to allow intensified housing. At best, we would end up like San Francisco – where no-one who works in the central city can afford to live there, with available housing monopolised by privileged tech-workers who commute 2 hours down the road to Silicon Valley. In this respect, Lee and Easte are like the ancient English King Canute, said to have attempted to order the rising tide to turn back.

Kill your children

Peter Nunns on Transportblog has convincingly demonstrated that “local governments do not represent the young, except occasionally by accident or in a mood of generosity.”¹⁸ This is certainly borne out in both turnout figures and the ages of candidates in Auckland's recent elections – which is why Chloë Swarbrick's quixotic tilt at the mayoralty was such a hopeful sign. But it became increasingly important as the young became one of the major targets for the

wrath of conservatives from both Left and Right railing against Auckland's urbanisation.

One disturbing manifestation of the anti-Unitary Plan movement, noted by several commentators, has been its outright ageism – older, asset-rich people expressing their contempt for younger people who complain that traditional urban patterns in Auckland would lead to them not being able to afford to live in their own city. At a hotly contested hearing on the UP in February this year, which was packed out with older anti-UP protestors from the “leafy suburbs”:

Flora Apulu from the council's Youth Advisory Panel told the council she and her colleague Alex Johnston were “probably the only young people in this room”.

“Oh, poor things,” called out someone at the back.¹⁹

But this anti-youth attitude doesn't just come from the traditionally selfish Right. On the conservative left wing, Penny Bright described Generation Zero as “wolf cubs” and “the youth wing of the Property Council”, while Martyn Bradbury railed against “blue green millennials”²⁰ and elsewhere repeated the argument that Millennials are lost to the left as a generation as they have only ever growing up knowing neoliberal values.²¹

Our old friend Mike Lee, writing on The Daily Blog, continued in this vein:

It is rather sad and unfair that the generation of Aucklanders who bought run-down villas and bungalows in Grey Lynn, Ponsonby and Westmere etc., and lovingly did them up, often with their own hands, are now meant to feel guilty.²²

Of course, the “generation” he speaks of were beneficiaries of racially-biased gentrification. Grey Lynn and Ponsonby were heavily Polynesian working-class suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s. They were pushed out of the area in the 1980s, as industrial jobs shifted to the outer suburbs such as Mangere or Ōtara, and young, “hipster”, Pākehā took advantage to buy

¹⁷ <http://Transportblog.co.nz/2016/07/29/developer-profits-and-capital-gains-on-housing/>

¹⁸ <http://Transportblog.co.nz/2016/08/17/local-governments-democracy-problem/>

¹⁹ <http://thespinoff.co.nz/politics/25-02-2016/aww-poor-thing-a-victory-for-the-loudest-aucklanders-in-the-room/>

²⁰ <http://thedailyblog.co.nz/2016/08/28/the-spinoffs-first-great-victory-in-their-unitary-plan-war-on-blah-blah-wheres-patrick-reynolds-now/>

²¹ <http://thedailyblog.co.nz/2016/09/25/millennials-gen-xers-and-baby-boomers/>

²² <http://thedailyblog.co.nz/2016/09/05/guest-blog-mike-lee-the-unitary-plan-its-about-profits-for-the-big-developers-not-decent-housing-for-all-aucklanders/>

²³ For example: http://www.salon.com/2014/04/08/gentrifications_insidious_violence_the_truth_about_american_cities/

up cheaper housing in what were then insalubrious but culturally rich suburbs. This generation subsequently benefitted from the massive neoliberal housing boom. They may have “done up” their Ponsonby villas, but no amount of “doing up” can justify a 2000% increase in capital value over 30 years.

Gentrification of previously working-class suburbs can be seen as an act of violence against their inhabitants²³ - a modern echo of the colonial dispossession of the indigenous people of Tāmaki Makarau (whose rights are, sadly, still not recognized in the final Unitary Plan).²⁴ Lee’s statement shows a lack of awareness of his and his constituents’ privilege which should disqualify him from being considered part of the “left”, if we consider that to be the political movement for social equality.

Immigration: the conservative left’s dirty secret

We saw above that young people were one of the scapegoats of both traditional Right and conservative Left for the changes in the face of Auckland they are resisting. We saw Mike Lee above put forward what we might call a “populationist” argument, that if Auckland’s growth threatens his constituents’ privileges, then growth should be slowed or stopped. But, almost as an afterthought in his blog spots, he touches on another scapegoat – immigration.

This is the traditional domain of the conservative right. An organisation called the Public Transport Users Association has combined advocacy for reform of Auckland’s mass transit system with arguments from its leading figures that Auckland’s issues can be solved by cutting immigration – which is what you would expect from people associated with the NZ First party.²⁵

But let’s return to one of Mike Lee’s blog posts already mentioned above, this time with emphasis added:

In regard to Auckland’s housing problem, **government policies stoking up immigration into Auckland** (demand) and its reluctance to build

state houses (supply) are also contributing factors.

If Lee were a consistent opponent of Auckland’s “overpopulation” (which, as Transportblog has consistently argued, is a natural consequence of its pre-eminent position in the current New Zealand economy), he might find out that natural increase – simply put, people having babies – is a larger component of Auckland’s population growth than all migration from overseas and from elsewhere in New Zealand put together. Therefore, if Lee (or Graeme Easte) were really worried about Auckland’s population growth, they might more fruitfully consider putting contraceptives in the drinking water.

Sadly, this goes along with the reprehensible recent embrace of immigration-control rhetoric by both the Labour and Green Parties.²⁷ Phil Goff himself decided to pander to anti-immigrant sentiment as part of his all-things-to-all-constituencies campaign.²⁸ But every socialist and social progressive must draw a hard line against any such scapegoating of immigrants or immigration as a problem. Lee might well argue that by “immigration” he meant all migration to Auckland, including that from other parts of the country, such as the exodus from rural areas which worries Easte. But whether a migrant is from Tehran or Tokoroa, freedom of movement is a basic human right. A left-wing politics which makes sense in the globalised future must argue strongly that all migrants are welcome here, especially in our most multicultural city. Rebuilding our cities to sustainably welcome those who want to live here will surely be cheaper than building a Donald Trump-style wall along the Bombay Hills.

It seems only fitting, finally, that the population/anti-migrant stance of the conservative Left is mirrored by an open or tacit reliance on emigration to maintain the status quo. Like Ireland, New Zealand has historically encouraged its young, ambitious troublemakers to go overseas to make their fortune and express their creativity – only returning here to retire, or perhaps to bring up their children in a carefully insulated environment. But the radical Left has an interest in making Auckland, and all of Aotearoa, a place fit for young people to live and work – and build a better

²⁴ <http://thespinoff.co.nz/auckland-2016/15-08-2016/squatters-on-their-own-whenua-hirini-kaa-on-the-age-old-problem-in-brand-our-new-unitary-plan/>

²⁵ <http://ptua.org.nz/1/> - PTUA leader Jon Reeves was a NZ First candidate at the last election. Anti-immigrant comments from PTUA members can be found regularly on posts on Transportblog.

²⁶ <http://Transportblog.co.nz/2015/04/24/in-defense-of-population-growth/>

²⁷ <http://www.newshub.co.nz/politics/greens-govt-immigration-curbs-not-enough-2016101512>

²⁸ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/83642545/Auckland-mayoral-hopeful-Phil-Goff-Limit-immigration-to-fix-housing-crisis>

²⁹ Chief among these would be the tourist tram loop at Wynyard Quarter and the siting of the future Parnell railway station – see comments on this post for more. <http://Transportblog.co.nz/2016/09/23/september-16-at-board-meeting/>

tomorrow.

Whose Left is it anyway?

This article has concentrated on Mike Lee's blog posts and public statements because he's the loudest and most prominent promoter of anti-urbanist ideas on the Auckland centre-left. Of course, as his defenders at The Daily Blog loudly proclaim, he has a good track record in Auckland local body politics, defending public assets and promoting public transport (though Transportblog have argued that he has also pushed through some blunders).²⁹

Marxists have a saying that "being determines consciousness" - simply put, that how you live your life determines how you think. Mike Lee's main achievements for the Left were as chair of the Auckland Regional Council, when he was elected by all the people of the old Auckland City, from Avondale to Remuera to Otahuhu. His anti-Unitary Plan stance, however, has been as the councillor for the Waitemata/Gulf ward - including the central city but dominated by the gentrified, superwealthy suburbs of Ponsonby, Grey Lynn, Herne Bay et al. The other City Vision councillors are elected from either that ward or the less-gentrified but still well-off Mt Albert/Mt Eden/Mt Roskill area. One does not need to be a Marxist to point out that a good elected politician promotes the interests of their constituents.

Lee's "grumpy old man" stance on the UP provoked the liberal, pro-urbanist blog The Spinoff to endorse his main rival in the election - former broadcaster and traditional Tory Bill Ralston.³⁰ Ralston's stance on the UP - expressed in a tweet as "Pass the Plan and move on guys"³¹ - was the only thing to recommend him, and third candidate Rob Thomas would have been a much better choice for progressive voters in the Chloë Swarbrick mode.³² This endorsement led to a predictable storm of condemnations by Martyn Bradbury, Chris Trotter and other older leftists on The Daily Blog.³³ This went as far as "shill-baiting" - accusations that The Spinoff and Transportblog had actually been paid off to take their position.³⁴

The outrage that any progressives might pose a

threat to their existing social and institutional circles is a recurring feature of what I call the "conservative left". Similar anger was raised among supporters of Phil Goff at the Swarbrick campaign, arguing that "a vote for Chloë is a vote for Victoria Crone". But in the case of Bradbury, Trotter, Lee et al., we seem to see simple anger and incomprehension of a challenge by a younger generation to their prejudices, and their old mates. Those who jumped to Mike Lee's defence should have remembered that when an "old Leftie" defends the rights of the wealthy and privileged, that doesn't make it a left-wing position.

A Left which writes off the next generation, which distrusts the ways it wants to live, work and shape its future, is simply doomed. 30 years of globalised neoliberalism have ended the optimism of the baby-boomer generation that their children would have a better future than they did. Now it is an asset-rich generation which, ironically, has itself internalised the tenets of neoliberalism - in particular, that of ignoring the future in the interests of defending current privilege.

Is this the future?

One amusing point in the campaign was where Bradbury smeared Generation Zero and Transportblog as privileged "blue-greens", even though he himself had argued two years ago that there was no such thing.³⁵ However, one notable feature of the election might have been precisely the emergence of a blue-green constituency - that is, economically privileged voters supporting the concepts of sustainable urbanism. Rightist mayoral candidate Victoria Crone uncovered this when, at a candidate's meeting on the solidly blue North Shore, she argued that Auckland desperately needed a new car tunnel under the Waitemata Harbour. To her apparent surprise, this didn't go down well. Under Len Brown's carefully centrist promotion of public transport and intensification, North Shore voters seem to have been won to the need for prioritising a cross-harbour rail connection.³⁶ This was borne out by the North Shore ward giving both its Council seats to liberal pro-

³⁰ <http://thespinoff.co.nz/voting-guides/waitemata-and-gulf-ward/>

³¹ <https://twitter.com/BillyRalston/status/763593928713003008>

³² <http://www.robthomas.co.nz/>

³³ Trotter's two cents: <http://thedailyblog.co.nz/2016/09/25/must-read-sunday-from-good-guys-to-fall-guys-the-spinoff-and-generation-zero-fail-to-endorse-mike-lee/>

³⁴ See Trotter in previous note on The Spinoff, and Bradbury on Transportblog: <http://thedailyblog.co.nz/2016/10/04/blog-watch-dear-transport-blog-whos-your-daddy/> It was reported that Mike Lee had made similar accusations about The Spinoff on Twitter, but we can't find references for that.

³⁵ <http://thedailyblog.co.nz/2014/03/18/why-mana-is-greens-best-friend-and-not-the-mythical-blue-greens/>

³⁶ <http://www.metromag.co.nz/city-life/the-long-read/the-man-in-the-middle/>

urbanist candidates Chris Darby and Richard Mills.

The very close result on the North Shore may have tipped the balance on the Council. It seems that the incoming council will have a similar 11-9 split between progressives and conservatives on the interrelated issues of housing and transport. Two of the most negative right-wing councillors have gone (Wood and Brewer), while Mike Lee beat Bill Ralston back by a small but comfortable margin, Rob Thomas coming a creditable third. Of course, the previous council was marked by the sometimes erratic but generally progressive leadership of Len Brown. Whether the beige man Phil Goff will carry on this tradition, or skew towards the conservatives, can't be predicted right now.

So – to raise the inevitable socialist question – what is to be done? The most important task of radicals in reactionary times is to swim against the stream – to continue promoting unpopular ideas until such time as the tide turns. To call Generation Zero, Transportblog and The Spinoff “blue-green” is a slander, but neither are they red-green ecosocialists. Discussions on Transportblog of placing tolls on motorway driving, for example, have shown a blindspot as to how road pricing would hit the most vulnerable in our society – such as cleaners who have to travel from the outer suburbs to the CBD. What is needed is for socialists to engage with the “New Urbanists” who congregate around such organisations, to challenge these blindspots and to make sure that an environmentally sustainable Auckland is also socially just – while rejecting the conservative leftists who, in The Spinoff's memorable phrase, are “intent on trapping Auckland in a 1950s time prison”.

Ideally, by the time of the next local body elections in 2019 – or even for the general election of 2020! - we might hope for a new, radical political vehicle which would stand on something like this, as suggested by @tiredsounds on Twitter:

- 1) open borders, with full legal protection for migrant workers, encourage unions to work with migrants and the unemployed to ensure labour is not undersold;
- 2) intensification of cities - higher density housing, light rail and forms of electric based mass transit.

To this, we might simply add a new programme of public housing – intensified, environmentally sustainable, located in the desirable parts of the urban area rather than new ghettos, built for occupation not speculation. Such a simple project would at once challenge the conservative left to stop their grumpy

scapegoating of young people and migrants, while challenging the “blue-greens” to take issues of social justice seriously. Could it be that the people who supported Chloë Swarbrick and Rob Thomas are keen to take such a challenge on.

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The housing crisis and the scapegoating of 'foreigners'

By Ian Anderson, Fightback member and MA student (adapted from thesis on 'publics' in Aotearoa/New Zealand)

The housing crisis is a key site of struggle over inequality in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As many increasingly note, an increasing proportion of people do not own the homes they live in. Yet both of the major parties obscure the causes of the housing crisis, perhaps to keep investors and privileged voters onside (particularly older Pakeha, more likely than other groups to vote).

In Aotearoa/NZ, the housing bubble has yet to burst at the time of writing. House prices in Auckland quadrupled from 1991-2014, and wages have not kept up. The growth in exchange value (price) already undermines the use value of housing (a place to live); decreasing numbers of people can afford housing. Recent years have seen a drop in homeownership to just below 50% of the adult population. The same period has seen a 25% spike in homelessness.

National barely acknowledges the housing crisis. As of late August 2016, Key has finally conceded the existence of a housing crisis after years of pressure. However, Key evaded responsibility for the crisis, blaming the previous Labour government.

Meanwhile Labour, attempting to court more of a working-class or conscientious audience, acknowledge the housing crisis while obscuring its cause. This was most shockingly underlined by Labour's controversial 'Chinese surnames' intervention (where Labour released a list of home buyers with 'Chinese surnames'), failing to distinguish between migrant labour and international capital. As local hip hop artist David Dallas argues, in his excellent track I Don't Rate That:

They buying everything that ain't taxed
Blame it on the Chinese
Say it's foreign buyers

But if a Brit buys up you don't bat an eyelid
Fuckin' wilin'
Could be third generation migrants
But we out hear checking up on last names
What's next gonna check what shape their eyes is
Tell the truth it probably wouldn't be surprising

Growing social and economic contradictions among the people; between property owner and vagrant, mortgagee and lender, landlord and tenant; are safely displaced onto a nonpublic, an 'Other', defined through racial rather than economic characteristics. In fact, although the government does not collect comprehensive stats on ownership of housing, data from Land Information New Zealand indicates that only 3% of buyers and sellers are foreign tax residents

More broadly, content analysis of Labour Party press releases reveals that they never identify 'investors', 'speculators', 'bankers' per se as a negative influence; rather, they only couple these sorts of terms with terms such as 'Australian' or 'foreign'. Considering business interests fund both major parties, and generally act as a coercive influence ('business confidence' is a key term in electoral commentary), Labour is apparently unwilling to alienate local business.

According to Roy Morgan polls, New Zealanders' main concern is 'inequality'. However, content analysis reveals that the two major parties appeal to 'New Zealanders' as their main constituency, a nationally rather than economically defined public. Examining opposite terms to New Zealander, National is the most likely party to use the term 'international', while Labour is the most likely party to use the term 'foreigner'. Whereas National seeks to appeal to local and international investors, Labour scapegoats foreigners rather

than challenging capital per se.

The housing crisis presents a challenge that both major parties are apparently unwilling to address. Marxist geographer David Harvey notes in *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* that many middle-class 'consumers' gain (precarious) wealth from housing bubbles, not only super-rich investors: "housing asset values have become important political objectives for larger and larger segments of the population and a major political issue because the exchange value for consumers is as important as the exchange value earned by producers". Herein lies the contradiction for major parties; how to address the housing crisis without alienating voters who benefit from the boom. New Zealanders are the main owners of New Zealand housing, and many benefit from driving up prices (landlords, for example).

The housing crisis is driven by the internal contradictions of capitalism, both local and international. As David Harvey argues, the 'exchange value' (as a commodity) of housing undermines the 'use value' (as a right). Neither major party will address the roots of the crisis. The existing movements for public housing and renters' rights (see Renters United) offer more of a basis for building. We need a combined, independent social movement demanding an expansion of high-quality urban public housing; a clamp-down on all speculation and profiteering (whether local or international); and prioritisation of the 'use value' of housing over the 'exchange value'.

2017 Summer Conference Resolutions

By Daphne Lawless and Ian Anderson

1. **Electoral politics:** Although Fightback remains open to the possibility of electoral alternatives, none of the current options are convincing. While Labour and the Greens each have a leadership captured by neoliberalism, MANA lost a lot of ground and credibility with 2014's Internet Mana campaign. Fightback disaffiliates from MANA, and does not collectively endorse any party in the 2017 New Zealand General Elections. Individual members may support parties on their own volition.
2. **Syria:** Fightback endorses the Syrian revolution and will investigate ways we can support Syrian solidarity in New Zealand, particularly through using the magazine and website.
3. **Programmatic unity:** Fightback acknowledges the encroachment of right-wing populism since the Global Financial Crisis, and emphasises the following points of unity:
 - i) internationalism, in the sense of solidarity with all the oppressed (including all indigenous struggles) as opposed to picking sides in disputes between various oppressive capitalist states or trying to piggyback nationalist/xenophobic movements;
 - ii) pro-urban, pro-technology ecosocialism;
 - iii) egalitarian skepticism; authoritarianism and what used to be called "obscurantism" go hand in hand.

Conspiracy theory is essentially elitist in that it appeals to a hidden secret truth known only by the In Crowd. pro-queer, pro-trans, pro-sex worker, pro-sexual expression feminism.

*If you'd like to **get involved** in these discussions, please contact us:*

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About Fightback + Core Program

Fightback is a socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

We recognise that capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa / New Zealand through colonisation. While we draw substantially on European whakapapa and intellectual traditions, we seek to break the unity of the European colonial project, in favour of collective self-determination and partnership between tangata whenua and tau iwi. We recognise that this must be a learning process. Fightback is a place to stand for those seeking to dismantle all oppression and exploitation. While we draw inspiration and lessons from history, theoretical agreement on past revolutions is not the basis for our unity. Rather, we unify around a common programme for transformation here and now.

As individuals we are involved in trade unions, feminist organising, anti-war action, and various forms of work. As a collective, Fightback develops propaganda that seeks to link this wider work with a socialist programme.

10-Point Programme

Fightback stands for the following core programme, and for building institutions of grassroots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:

- 1.** Constitutional transformation based on Tino Rangatiratanga, Mana Motuhake and workers power. Tangata whenua and community co-ops to operate as kaitiaki over public resources.
- 2.** Secure, appropriate and meaningful work for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be replaced with a Universal Basic Income.
- 3.** International working class solidarity. Open borders, full rights for migrant workers. Recognition of Pasefika rights to self-determination. Opposition to all imperialist intervention and alliances, including New Zealand state's participation in military occupations, 'free trade' agreements and surveillance agreements.
- 4.** No revolution without women's liberation. Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.
- 5.** An ecosocialist solution to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.
- 6.** Freedom of information. End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.
- 7.** Abolish prisons, replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.
- 8.** Universal right to housing. Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.
- 9.** Fully-funded healthcare at every level. Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to "top-down" efforts to change working people's behaviour.
- 10.** Fully-funded education at every level, run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining kaupapa Maori approaches.

